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How Can General Education Teachers Learn to Build Positive Relationships with EL Students by Integrating EL Best Practice Strategies Into Their Teaching?

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HOW CAN GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS LEARN TO BUILD POSITIVE

RELATIONSHIPS WITH EL STUDENTS BY INTEGRATING EL BEST PRACTICE

STRATEGIES INTO THEIR TEACHING?

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in English as a Second Language

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Having taught 8th graders in a middle school setting for three years, I have noticed a pattern in my and other educators' interactions with students. The educators that develop strong, positive relationships with students have more success motivating students academically. In the small group setting of sheltered English Learner classrooms, I have experienced this kind of positive relationship building with students. I have listened as students told me about their truths and their experiences from the countries they have lived in. Robbery, kidnapping, and witnessing rape have been among some of the experiences that have been related to me by students. I cannot imagine living through experiences such as this. The stories are not all bleak, however. Students have also shared stories of their successes against the odds. One student was involved in an accident that paralyzed her. When she could finally return to school, she did so in a wheelchair. She did not give up, continued with her physical therapy, and has made progress to the point where she is able to walk without support now. Her resilience is an inspiration. Many students have shared with me their joy on becoming the first member

of their family to attend college. Knowing how difficult it is to learn a language and the challenges that go along with it, I am greatly impressed with the progress my students have made.

Furthermore, these students are in a new country with a new language. They oftentimes do not feel secure enough in their relationships with the adults in the school to share their experiences, which would be a practice that could give students an outlet for what is troubling them. In a large group setting, such as a general education core class, language learners do not feel comfortable sharing personal stories (Ueno, 2019). In the sheltered classes I teach, students are much more willing to share, which in turn builds positive relationships and trust between the student and myself as an educator. I intend to more closely examine the nature of *how general education teachers learn to build positive relationships with EL students by integrating EL best practice strategies into their teaching.*

In this chapter, the reader will be shown the rationale for choosing this research question. This will be followed by a background of the community that is impacted by and has influenced the research. The researcher's background and the researcher's journey to understanding the topic influence the project and will be examined. Finally, a description of the intention for how this research will benefit students will be shared with the reader.

Rationale

The need for positive relationships in students' lives is acknowledged by educational best practices. For example, the use of Advisory time and positive supports in Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) show that the effects of positive relationships motivate students to strive for success in school (Shulkind and Foote, 2009). Due to the additional pressures of learning a new language, I posit that learners will see added benefit from a positive relationship with their sheltered classroom teacher that will extend into their content area courses. The purpose of providing this additional motivation is based on the understanding that motivation is a powerful force in nurturing a "long-term value placed on learning the language," (Tarone and Swierzbin, p. 4, 2009). The rationale of this project is to show how positive relationships can benefit language learners and to equip teachers of language learners, both English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and content area teachers, with the tools to build meaningful, positive relationships with their language learner students. This will stand to benefit all students as teachers and students work together to build a stronger learning community.

Community Background

I teach 8th grade at a middle school, in Faribault, Minnesota. The community of Faribault is largely populated by people of Northern European descent. The history of the town centered around a trading post in the early 19th century and French and English relationships with the American Indian population in the area. Historically, manufacturing has been a distinct component of life in Faribault. Throughout the 20th century, the town steadily grew and included blue collar, manufacturing jobs. Some notable companies are Jennie-O Turkey, Faribault Dairy, and Faribault Manufacturing.

The abundance of jobs and the small town atmosphere contributed to people migrating from Latin America to find work and community in Faribault. The city has also been a leader in education. Faribault is the site of the Minnesota Academies for the Deaf and Blind. The effect this has had on the community has created a community of diverse backgrounds and ideas.

On the other side of the world, events set in motion by the then-dictator of Somalia, Siad Barre, would lead to a refugee crisis on the Horn of Africa. Barre engineered an attempt to occupy the Ogaden region and wrest control of the land from Ethiopia. One of the clans which supported Barre was the Isaaq clan. As the conflict progressed, the tide of war turned against Somalia and resulted in a total Ethiopian victory. Barre then turned on the Isaaq clan as a scapegoat. A genocide ensued, which would be known as the Hargeisa Holocaust. Siad Barre was deposed shortly after the genocide, but the newly formed power vacuum created rivalry and civil war throughout Somalia. Many people in Somalia were displaced and became refugees to escape the fighting. Refugee camps opened up in neighboring, more stable countries, and filled with people seeking safety and a better life. In the early 1990s, Somalis began to be relocated, with a portion being sent to Minnesota as refugees. Somali resettlement in Minnesota eventually included Faribault in an attempt to disperse the refugee population into Greater Minnesota in addition to resettlement in the Metropolitan region (DeRusha, Jason, 2011).

The community of Faribault now has a healthy, robust Somali population, which I began working with in the fall of 2016 when I began teaching 8th grade at the middle

school. Currently, the English Learner (EL) program at the school still serves students at a lower level proficiency similar to what could be expected when people would arrive in the U.S. from the refugee camps. However, as current political events impact the situation, and immigration from Africa is drastically diminished, I have noticed more and more students relating that they were born in the U.S. Even so, the majority of my EL students are of Somali ethnicity and speak the Somali language. The other sizeable segment of language learner students speak Spanish or are of Latin American backgrounds and are enrolled in my EL classes.

Researcher Background

Reflecting on my community and neighborhood I was a part of while growing up, I realize that it has had an impact on me and my passion for working with and advocating for language learners. I grew up in Austin, MN, which is a small, industrial town known for the production of SPAM™. I attended a Catholic school that was relatively small. As far back as my time in elementary school, I remember students in class who were from other countries and spoke different languages. There were always two or three students in the class who came from other countries. I tended to make friends with these students as opposed to the other kids who were "like me." I was always fascinated by the idea of being in another country and enjoyed the company of people who had a different background and perspective from my own. One event that has stuck with me was when two students from Bosnia joined our class in the late 90s. Their families were fleeing the violence that rocked the region during the Bosnian genocide. The students were very different and were at the receiving end of racism and bullying. I witnessed this and did

not know how to advocate. I was left with only anger. As time passed, I matured and learned how to stand up for people who are being ostracized because of their differences. This has played an important role in helping me to develop a strong passion for advocating for students that are new to the country and learning English. These experiences have shaped how I interact with students in my own class and how I prepare my students to succeed in our society.

Journey to Understanding

My journey to this question frequently involves self-reflection on my part. I want to know how to become a better educator, so I observe my students and reflect on how I teach. Building relationships with students is not a quick process nor is it always an easy process. It is more of an art. Both parties need to be empathetic and understanding in order to gain ground. With students who have not fully developed their proficiency in social interactions, the adult is called upon to take more steps forward to meet the student than the reverse. One way that I build relationships is by connecting my life experiences with those that my students face at one time or another. Reflecting on hobbies and leisure experiences is a way that I have made connections with my students in the past. One of my hobbies is baking bread. I did more reading on the subject than I have done for many college classes. I also spent a great deal of time not only researching and learning the "why" and "how" behind recipes and different flavors but also in experimenting. That in turn also led to failures. I relate to my students about the time I made a loaf of bread that could have acted as a doorstop. However, by continuing to practice and try, I eventually became quite skilled. I know that students also have areas of interest that they spend an

inordinate amount of time researching. That research may consist of YouTube videos about a particular game, but many times, students do not realize that they are engaging in a line of inquiry usually to solve a problem or answer their "burning question."

This is what my line of self-reflection will often lead to. How can this be used to benefit students? How can this set them up for success? Continuing on the topic of hobbies, I connect it to relationship building because I have shared stories of my own failures with students and modeled persistence. Due to our positive relationship, students feel more comfortable trying new things and learning new skills. They can draw on my modeling as a blueprint for how to cope with failure and persist. An event where I could share enrichment activities with students was the time our school had built in for Academic Seminar. This is a portion of time that is set aside for students to select mini-classes held by teachers that involve an interest area or activity. One of the seminars I conducted was a session where I taught and played chess with the students. Many of the EL students I had in class had never played a game against me and they were excited to "beat the *macalin* (teacher, in Somali)." It was less about playing a game than learning a ruleset, communicating about strategies, and, for the times students would come after school to chat and play a game of chess, socialize with someone from a culture other than their own.

So, looking at the question again, *how can general education teachers learn to build positive relationships with EL students by integrating EL best practice strategies into their teaching?* Authentic experiences like the informal chess club tell a story that informs us of what it looks like when positive relationships are built. It is not a process

that can be reduced to listing off questions in a business-like manner and expecting students to share their likes, dislikes, hopes, dreams, struggles, and fears. It is a mindset that requires a genuine human concern for the young person sitting on the other side of the desk. It is advocacy for the young person who is struggling and does not know where to turn. Positive relationship building is born from an authentic desire to better the condition of someone else. This is the firm foundation from which I will go forward to show how positive relationships with students lead to greater academic and life success.

Intention

In this chapter, the rationale for exploring the topic of positive relationships has been stated. The background of the community that is impacted by and has influenced the research has been shared. Influences that have shaped the approach I will take to this topic have also been detailed. All of this was shared to illuminate the need for creating positive relationships in the sheltered classroom. The community where I serve as an educator is very diverse. By creating positive relationships, we can create community and promote academic success.

Students deserve to be given the greatest chance to succeed by the adults in their lives. Language learners have similar struggles that many other young people have with the addition of the unique challenges of learning both a new language and the overt and covert rules of a new society. Educators are positioned to act as both role models and, of course, explicit teachers of content. Explicitly teaching language gives students the opportunity to learn the language in a non-threatening environment while being taught

about how academic language is used as opposed to simply picking up language through social use. Teachers must also model both social and academic language for students as well as openly discuss the covert rules of the society for language learners. Positive relationship building enters this equation because students will be more receptive to a language or behavior model that they respect and feel comfortable with. The teacher also relies on students to share questions and concerns that they have. People will acquire different aspects of the covert rules of society. If a student does not feel comfortable asking the teacher about an aspect of social conduct, the teacher will be unable to clarify confusion unless directly observing the student struggling. Building positive relationships is important because students will receive a greater benefit from their education. For this reason, we must examine *how positive relationships built in the sheltered setting can be turned into opportunities to motivate students to become more*

academically successful in general.

In the following chapter, the literature concerning three main areas relating to how positive relationships are built, nurtured, and enlisted for student success will be examined and discussed. The three main areas of research that are related to creating positive relationships in the classroom are the effects of positive relationships in the classroom, strategies that build positive relationships, and how co-teaching and collaboration affect positive relationships. The literature will demonstrate research that has been conducted in the topic area. This will solidify the need for exploration of how positive relationships in the sheltered classroom benefit students academically.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

When exploring the effects of positive relationships between teachers and students, there are three main themes that emerge. The first theme is the actual benefits that positive relationships confer onto students. The second is a discussion of how positive relationships can be built and nurtured in the classroom setting. Finally, the role of co-teaching is vitally important to how teacher/student relationships play out as language learner students progress from the sheltered classroom to the mainstream. These themes aid in the understanding of *how general education teachers can learn to build positive relationships with EL students by integrating EL best practice strategies into their teaching.*

Research that will be discussed will show how positive relationships between teachers and students can help students grow academically and emotionally within society. The research will specifically show how language learners benefit from the addition of a positive adult in the school setting. To create positive relationships, there

must be intentional work done on the part of the teacher. Teachers, being the adult in the dynamic, will bear most of the responsibility for fostering the positive relationship. It requires a great deal of work, but after showing the benefits of positive relationships, the reader will understand the importance of these relationships. The theme of the role of co-teaching advances both the discussion of positive relationship building and methods for creating positive relationships. The examination of the role of co-teaching expands the viewpoint to span across classrooms, schools, and grade levels. By bringing in multiple tiers of opportunity to build relationships with students, educators become more able to reach all students. Before seeing what the literature has to offer, a central theory will be adopted to tie the discussion together.

Social Development Theory

The central theory that provides common ground for all of the work that will be examined in this literature review is Social Development Theory advanced by Lev Vygotsky. In Vygotsky's theory, development and learning cannot be separated from social context, language plays a crucial role in learning and development, and the gap between what a person can do with and without assistance is known as the Zone of Proximal Development (Bodrova, Leong, and Davidson, 1994). The question of how students are affected by the various aspects of positive relationships is informed by the ideas posited by Vygotsky.

Social context informs relationship building due to the social nature of human development. Teaching is inherently a social endeavor. To become more effective at

teaching, the educator must embrace the social nature of teaching. Through listening or reading, learners acquire new information and process that information through their previous experiences or schema (Bodrova et al., 1994). Furthermore, learners can advance the quality of information they are obtaining from the source through inquiry. By seeking out additional information, the learner is solidifying their learning. Vygotsky focused on the process of creating relationships and how that factored into the development of youth as opposed to simply focusing on the results (Jovanović, 2015). These processes are social and depend on understanding cultural mores, social cues, and social structure.

Language is essential to a Social Development lens because the medium by which learners will hear or read new information is language. In addition to input, learners use language production to engage in inquiry and collaboration (Bodrova et al., 1994). Both inquiry and collaboration advance learning when students make connections and use their curiosity to pursue knowledge. The cultural identity of the West leans toward individualistic philosophy. Collaboration is not a natural outcome of individualistic philosophy but must be supported and implemented (Jovanović, 2015). Collaboration is a key development component in the learning of language (Tarone and Swierzbin, 2009). As a developmental consideration language is a very important factor. For language learners, language is of vital importance. Learners who are acquiring another language need positive relationships with adults to advance proficiency in their additional language.

Positive relationships with educators give educators the knowledge of the students that they will need to construct meaningful exercises to take advantage of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD (Bodrova et al., 1994). Scaffolding is crucial to advancing a learner's ability in any learning objective. Educators create opportunities for students to show what they know. When students can successfully complete an objective on their own, they have shown that they are proficient. If a student can complete an objective with support, the objective is in their ZPD. If a student cannot complete an objective with support, it is outside of their ZPD. This is scaffolding. Positive relationships allow educators to configure learning opportunities to fall within the appropriate ZPD for each student. Every student is different. Therefore, all students will require somewhat different scaffolding to perform most effectively. From scaffolding, environment must also be considered.

The environment is influential on the development of youth because any environmental factors that exist around a person will exert some degree of influence on that person (Smith and Ferryhough, 2002). The school environment is one place that exerts an influence on the young person, which is crucial to the focus of this study. Vygotsky's study of environmental influences was expanded on by Urie Bronnfenbrenner. The environment was categorized into spheres of influence that have varying degrees of impact on a young person as that person develops (Christiansen, 2016). The home sphere is the closest and most influential factor in a young person's life. Next to that is the school sphere. This is where youth spend a great deal of time, and the relationships built here have a strong impact on the kinds of achievements students will

be able to access (Toste et al, 2015). The environment exerts influence upon students and needs to be considered to gain the full picture of what the young person brings to a positive relationship.

The central theory that guides discussion of creating positive teacher/student relationships is Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory. The theory describes how relationships fit into an educational context and the benefit of positive relationships. The language has changed somewhat since Vygotsky first advanced Social Development Theory, but the core idea remains the same: social relationships/positive teacher/student relationships are crucial for teachers to understand their students and for students to be able to reach proficiency in learning objectives.

The Effects of Positive Relationships

The reason that student/teacher positive relationships are highly valued by communities and schools who seek out educational best practices is the correlation between schools that outperform others and schools that create environments rich in positive relationships. According to Klingner, Boardman, Eppolito, and Shonewise (2012), schools that were highly ranked consistently used components that developed positive relationships. Some examples of these components are treating language learners as valued members of the school community, working with students as individuals, and respecting the language and culture of the language learner students.

Language Learners Add Value

Language learner students sometimes feel as if they are second class citizens. Acts such as pushing second-hand materials onto language learner students or treating students with a deficit mindset send a message that the language learners are not as important as the native English speakers (Toste et al, 2015). To address this, a community that will value its language learner students will provide the same kind of materials and resources to classrooms serving language learner students. This sends the message that the community values the students. It also reflects on the teacher who is the face of instruction and provides access to materials. The quality of learning materials can be used to show that students are valued and serve to build stronger relationships.

Furthermore, a deficit mindset focuses on what students do not know. If that mindset is followed, it can be carried to the conclusion that students who are learning English are to be viewed as "not knowing something." On the other hand, if educators use an asset mindset, they are positioned to begin viewing language learner students as a valuable addition to the learning community (Spencer, 2019). Language learner students may come from another country and have a different culture. This adds to the learning community because diversity brings strengths and viewpoints that would otherwise have been unavailable to members of the learning community. During collaboration, students in the 8th grade co-taught class were engaged in a background knowledge building activity about agriculture. Traditional American ideas about agriculture were shared by many native English speakers. One English learner student in the class spoke up and shared how her family practiced agriculture in East Africa. Students in the class would have never learned about diverse agricultural practices if it had not been for that student

speaking up. When relationships are strong, English learners feel comfortable sharing and adding value to the learning community (Gehlbach et al, 2012). Language learner students have much to add to the educational community when educators can move beyond a deficit mindset to expand possibilities for language learners.

Language Learners as Individuals

Working with language learners as individuals also builds the strength of relationships and the added value of the benefits for language learners. In language learning sheltered classrooms, class sizes are generally smaller than content area classes. By having smaller class sizes, educators are better able to give individual attention to language learners and build relationships (Bice and Perkins, 1997). In the sheltered classroom, there is more opportunity to get to know students. It is not uncommon for educators to devote some time to talk to students about personal likes and dislikes. For the language learner, this exercise allows students to practice speaking and listening in the target language as well as connect with the teacher. The educator has created a twofold benefit for the student of respecting the student as an individual, thereby increasing their self-efficacy, and creating an environment where discrimination is actively challenged (Dippold, 2014). Students who have strong social supports and experience self-efficacy are more likely to succeed in school (Yamamoto and Zepeda, 2004). Discrimination is counter-productive to education in no small part because it is largely fueled by ignorance. Discrimination also creates an unwelcoming atmosphere where students will feel fear, anxiety, and tension. An atmosphere of discrimination and prejudice is nonconducive to learning. By building relationships with students, teachers

can challenge prejudice more effectively and equip students with the ability to advocate for themselves (Dippold, 2014). Language learners greatly need self-advocacy modeling and skills. Learning an additional language is challenging by itself. Advocating for oneself is far more challenging without language proficiency. The language teacher will also be called on to advocate for students. By bringing students into this process, the student becomes an active participant in the advocacy and can learn from the educator's modeling. Relationships are the basis for building self-advocacy skills in language learners.

Treating students like individuals includes not stereotyping students by ethnicity or culture. By learning about students as individuals rather than stereotyping students, educators will be able to strengthen teacher/student relationships and break down prejudices (Yunus, Osman, and Ishak, 2011). Treating students as individuals allows educators to develop stronger relationships, which in turn helps push back against discrimination.

Respecting Language and Culture

Respect in the classroom is one of the most prevalent concerns of educators (ascd.org, 2012). By showing that the educator respects the student's language and culture, the educator becomes positioned to further support the learning of students who are language learners. Respect is reciprocal in nature. Respect that is shown to students stands a much greater chance of being returned to the teacher. As discussed above, the environment where mutual respect flourishes, is the environment that is most conducive

to learning. Respecting language learners' experiences, cultures, and truths has the benefit of developing a more inclusive and effective classroom (Wright, Taylor, MacArthur, Pressley, and Michael, 2000).

Developing positive relationships with language learners in the sheltered classroom is an excellent way to develop a respectful relationship between teachers and students. Students who had a teacher who developed a relationship with them reported a stronger feeling of respect for that educator (Uitto, 2000). To show that the educator has mutual respect for students of different cultures, the educator can involve literature from the students' cultures, find ways to connect the students' home language(s) to the content in the sheltered classroom, or involve parents in the classroom. Too often, minority languages are not given the appropriate level of respect that they deserve. This has been shown in U.S. history by way of the methodical program intended to erase Native American languages and cultures (Yamamoto and Zepeda, 2004, p. 176). Diverse languages create a rich culture, which benefits all in the community by promoting acceptance and inclusion, improvement in academic success, and an increase in diversity (Wright, et al, 2000, p. 63). Positive relationships can strengthen student success as well as communities of minority language learners.

Cautionary Considerations

As important as positive relationships are, there is value in discussing what is meant by *positive* relationships. These are relationships that are professional in nature and intention. The teacher is the facilitator of the relationship. As Uitto (2000) notes, many

professionals intend to create positive relationships with the young people in their

classes, but are concerned about where to draw the line (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, and

Schutz, 2009). That is, when does a relationship between an educator and a student cross

over from being positive, professional, and beneficial, to the danger zone. This can be a

hazard for teachers that may be seen as too casual or familiar with students and in danger

of litigation. This is also a hazard for students who are still vulnerable young people.

Some discussion will now follow of where the line is drawn when relationships are no

longer considered positive or professional.

Manos (2007) describes some of the behavior that will put relationships at risk of

no longer being positive or professional. Exchanging personal telephone numbers (social

media can be considered part of this list, as well), having students in the educator's home,

or being alone with students can all put the teacher at risk in addition to damaging the

positive benefits of the relationship. Teachers will also avoid being too physically close

out of concern for how the act is perceived. All of these considerations are made in

addition to obvious cautions to take such as following child safety laws. Positive

relationships have the young person's best interests at their core as well have an

educational intention as their outcome (Aultman, 2009). Furthermore, this list of concerns

that educators have voiced about the kinds of contact they are not willing to take is

smaller than the list of ways to connect, which will be discussed in detail later in this

chapter.

The list of concerns also does not preclude the possible benefits of creating

positive and professional relationships with students. As Uitto (2007) goes on to discuss,

it was found that students greatly respected the teachers that made an effort to connect with students. It was also found that the teachers that shared some part of their personal lives, such as a story or a personal concern, helped model for students how an unrelated adult handled a situation maturely. The story that Uitto relates about a classroom teacher whose mother was hospitalized and dying of cancer shared the story with her students. The students were interviewed later in their adult lives, and they still remember the impact the teacher had on them. They remembered how the teacher handled the situation maturely but with feeling for her mother. The way educators behave in their personal lives can also affect students. For language learners, it is extremely important to have additional supports to guide them in navigating the challenges of a new culture and society. Positive relationships in the sheltered classroom benefit language learners.

How to Create Positive Relationships

This section will discuss various effective methods educators can draw on to create positive relationships with students in the sheltered classroom. The literature and research on best practices in education show that the effects of positive relationships are beneficial for language learners in the sheltered classroom. The next step is to explore the most effective ways for educators to create and develop positive relationships with their language learner students. The path to creating and developing positive relationships includes practicing cultural competency, cultural responsiveness, advisory, positive reinforcement, and building rapport. All of this will create a safe, welcoming environment. By practicing these steps and making them a part of the classroom environment, the educator is positioned to give learners the best possible chance to learn.

Positive relationships that teachers build with their students are vitally important to success in the sheltered classroom and to success in the mainstream classroom. Teachers need to be aware of how to make positive relationships happen.

Cultural Competency

Students in the sheltered classroom come from a diverse array of backgrounds and experiences. Some students may have had limited or interrupted education experiences (SLIFE). Some students may have come to the U.S. with their families who were searching for work. And yet, some students may have been born in the U.S., but the dominant language spoken in their home is a language other than English, which qualifies the student for ESL services. It is clear that students come from different backgrounds, even if they are of the same ethnicity. For this reason, one important factor in building positive relationships is cultural competence (Lucas et al, 2008). Cultural competence is an understanding or willingness to understand other cultures and to be able to interact with people from other cultures. It is also the understanding of the subculture differences that exist within one seemingly monolithic culture. The relationships built in social work mirror aspects of small group relationships in the sheltered classroom.

A social worker, Nada Eltaiba (2014), highlights some successful experiences from the field of social work that have practical applications to the classroom. As Eltaiba (2014) shares, it is important not to begin a relationship with assumptions of the culture even if there is already background knowledge of the supposed culture that the person comes from. When educators see a roster that has Somali names, they may make

assumptions that the students are from a SLIFE background. However, these students may have been born in the U.S. and are in ESL services because a language other than English is the dominant language at home. This is where the educator must use cultural competency to put aside preconceptions, as well intentioned as they may be, and get to know students on an individual level. From cultural competency to the knowledge of cultural sensitivities, the next tool is cultural responsiveness.

Cultural Responsiveness

Understanding is the first step. After that, the educator must put into practice the knowledge and ability to effectively relate to people of different cultures. This is where cultural responsiveness comes into play. The word *responsive* here brings to mind how one uses their own personal framework to color interactions with others. In this case, the educator's cultural competency is coloring the level of cultural responsiveness. In order to raise awareness of cultural responsiveness, Melina Porto (2009) proposes to show how to create environments of cultural responsiveness. Culture goes beyond a look at differences in food and clothing, and delves into the subconscious ways people make decisions (Porto, 2009). Becoming self-aware of culture is a solid first step toward cultural responsiveness. From there educators must model cultural responsiveness to students. Youth do not always have positive role models to show how different cultures must be respected. It is up to the educator to show mature and appropriate responses to cultural issues. For example, in Porto's text, a teacher was holding class in Argentina. The Israeli embassy there was bombed. The teacher was told to discuss the incident with the class. There were mixed reactions. Some students did not care about the loss of life

since the victims were Jewish. Another student referenced a poem that was taught in the class to express compassion for the loss of life (Porto, 2009). Youth need adults to model empathy and compassion for people of all cultures, not just their own, to inspire advocacy for those who are different or cannot speak for themselves (Lucas et al, 2008). This kind of education and modeling from a respected adult that gives youth an empowered voice to stand up for what is right is what the community will reap from positive teacher/student relationships.

Advisory

With the foundations of cultural competence and responsiveness, the educator is positioned to make critical positive change in the lives of youth. One powerful, positive force for teacher/student connectedness and positive relationships is the use of an advisory program. The advisory is usually implemented on a school-wide basis in secondary school. If an educator's site does not have a form of advisory, advocacy for this program is strongly encouraged. Advisory is a time of the day that is set aside for the teacher to facilitate social skills support, academic support and check-in time, and to build strong relationships among the advisory (Shulkind and Foote, 2009). The advisor is the teacher that facilitates the group, and the advisees are the students who attend. The advisor and advisees meet regularly. Successful advisories show themes of the advisory as a 'family' and helping students bond (Shulkind and Foote, 2009).

During this time, the advisor teacher may meet with the students as a whole group to perform activities such as 'Circle,' which is a time for all students to have a voice.

These groups build the feeling of 'family' among the advisory. In the circle, all voices are equal with the facilitator taking the role of the Circle Keeper. In this time, the Circle Keeper promotes relationship building with students and relationship building among students. Some advisees will be more apt to share sooner. Some advisees may not feel comfortable sharing in the space. The facilitator's role is to give students positive verbal and nonverbal feedback that will encourage students to share. (Cressey et al, 2014). This takes time and the facilitator understands and respects that. Circle can sometimes lead to sensitive topics and students might be insensitive to each other. The educator in a successful advisory reminds students of respect for others and builds community (Shulkind and Foote, 2009). The advisory builds community and a feeling of 'family' through the use of Circle.

Advisories also help students bond as they strengthen the teacher/student positive relationship. Students in successful advisories were observed to avoid self-segregation by ethnicity and not engage in antisocial behaviors such as insults or put-downs (Shulkind and Foote, 2009). This comes back to the advisors because the educator who is acting as the advisor is responsible for facilitating interactions among students and giving positive advice. Student perceptions of advisory time have been observed to be positive. Students cite examples of when teachers were interested in their extracurricular activities, family and personal lives, and interests (Cressey et al, 2014). This was shown to strengthen the positive relationship between teacher and student (Shulkind and Foote 2009). Students were better able to navigate struggles and challenges with other students during their school day due to the advice and attention of their advisory teacher (Shulkind and Foote

2009). By guiding students to interact with others, desegregate themselves by ethnicity, and learn to self-regulate, the educator has become an adult that students know will provide a safe, but fair space for them to tackle the challenges of adolescence.

Advisory is a tool to build positive relationships between teachers and students due to the connections students make in advisory time, the guidance teachers offer to students, and the frequent, regular time and space that is given to students to have an adult that will act as a positive role model. Advisory is usually implemented school-wide. If it is not implemented in an educator's site, tools from advisory may be adopted. Teachers can build environments that honor each student's individuality. Teachers can also set aside time in the day to focus on positive relationships both between themselves and individual students, themselves and the whole group, and between students. This is time consuming, however, developing environments where students feel safe, welcome, and accepted can only be conducive to learning. The ultimate goal of education is to help students develop as young adults. Social skills are intertwined with the academic as each affects the other. Connections help students maintain strong social and academic progress in school (Shulkind and Foote, 2009). Advisory and its procedures help students build strong, beneficial, positive relationships with their teachers.

Positive Supports

The kinds of relationships that benefit students, both academically and socially, are positive relationships. Another program that focuses on the positives in students' lives is the Positive Behavior Supports and Intervention or PBIS. This program is sometimes

more strongly related to how it addresses students with behavior concerns. However, the

program posits that 80% of students will respond to Tier I interventions, 15% to Tier II,

and 5% to Tier III. Each tier is a successive intervention that requires sequentially more

adult intervention in the form of educators, administrators, and parent/guardian support.

This is shown by the following chart:
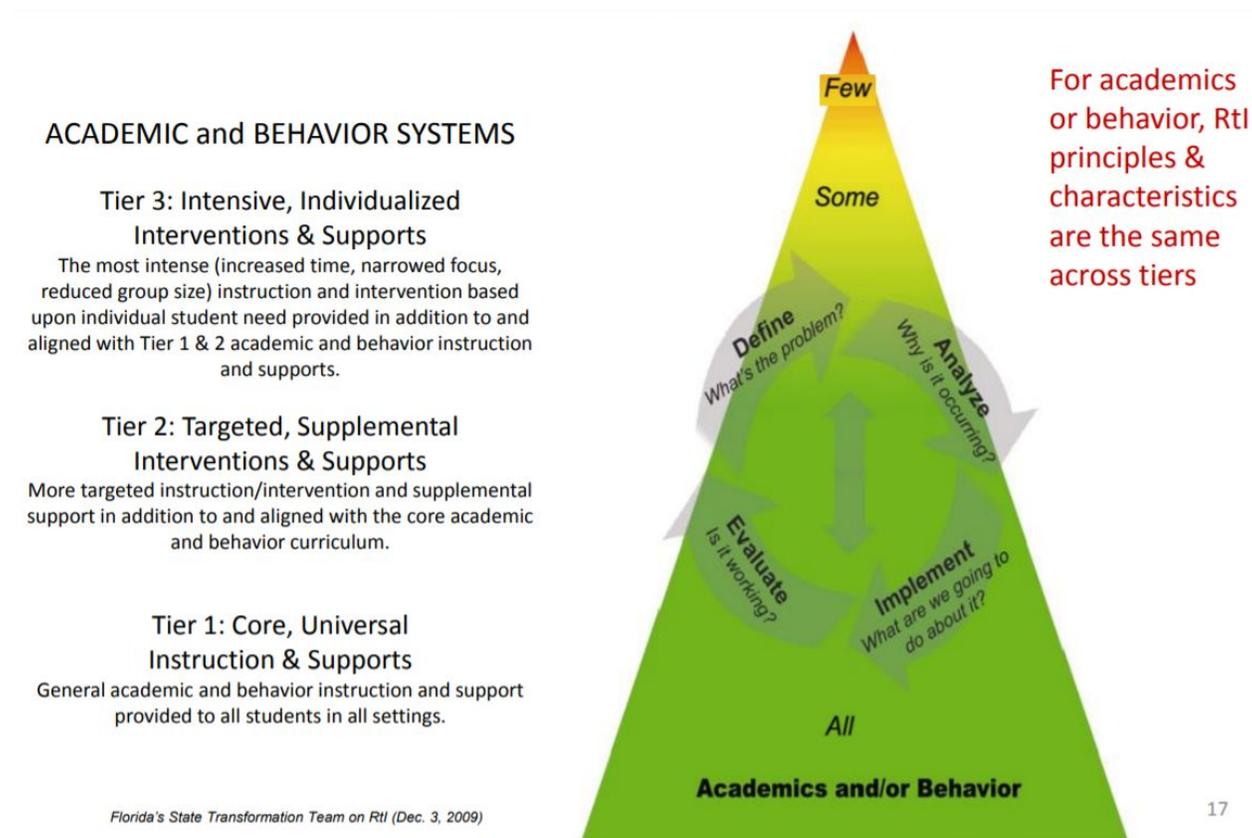
(pbis.org, 2009)

The reason PBIS works for building positive relationships between educators and

students is that PBIS focuses on the positives. The program also puts the adult/youth

relationship at the forefront. A positive student/teacher relationship is essential for not

only academic progress, but also for student social development (Cressey et al, 2014).

The community can only benefit if young people are raised with strong, positive, adult role models, effective academic support, and behavioral self-regulation. It is true that both the previous model of advisory and PBIS take a great deal of time and effort to implement, but it is undeniable that they have critical benefits for not only young people, but the community as a whole.

Building Rapport

In the previous section regarding the effects of positive student/teacher relationships, it was established that connectedness improves student motivation and academic success. Another path to the level of connectedness that helps students succeed, is student/teacher rapport. According to Webb and Barrett (2014), rapport is important because of the increase in student participation in class, student drive or motivation to succeed, and overall academic success. Webb and Barrett also draw from a field outside of education to draw in the specific procedures to build rapport. Business negotiations are highly interpersonal and therefore, can have classroom applications. The findings of what makes rapport are "facing the other person, leaning forward, making eye contact, and mimicry. . .," which is one of the higher forms of flattery if done respectfully (Webb and Barrett, 2014). These can be classified as courteous behaviors. The other aspects of building rapport were found to be seeking common ground, sharing information, and paying more attention to the individual.

The first component of building rapport is to engage in courteous behavior. What this looks like in a language learner classroom with secondary students is going to look

different than the source material these components were adopted from. The foremost consideration is that what is courteous in another person's culture may not be courteous in another; the reverse is also true (Yunus, Osman, and Ishak, 2011). For example, in Somali culture, eye contact with parents or teachers is generally not appropriate. Coupled with close proximity, this is something that can appear unnecessarily domineering to students from other cultures. The directive circles back to the need for understanding and communication. It is the educator's task to teach, so the educator is responsible for guiding themselves and students toward cultural understanding. Courteous behavior in the ESL classroom will be a combination of cultural education to teach students what is culturally acceptable/expected and common courteous behaviors, such as positive greetings every day, that build student self-efficacy.

Another aspect of rapport building is finding common ground with students. In the ESL classroom, this is part of building a culturally responsive environment. Language learners will respond positively to adults who show respect for their culture (Porto, 2010). Teacher behavior that builds rapport by finding common ground is accomplished through inquiring about student culture with the understanding that not all culture is a stereotypical 'tourist pamphlet.' All people are unique and will undoubtedly interpret and live their culture in different ways. This leads to sharing information. As was shown earlier, teachers who are willing to share an appropriate amount of personal information with a didactic purpose are much more likely to make a positive impact on students. Sharing information at an appropriate level is a reciprocal act that demands participation

from both parties. The educator as the mature adult will be required to put forth more effort.

Finally, all of these considerations lead the educator into paying individual attention to students. This is one clear advantage of the sheltered classroom. Small groups are more conducive to allowing educators to pay more individual attention to students. This is not to say it is impossible in the mainstream classroom. It will require acting intentionally to achieve the purpose of making sure all students receive some individual attention during the day. One way to accomplish this is 'Four at the Door" (top20training.com, 2016). This technique requires the educator to be present at the doorway every day. The 'Four' that are being referred to are:

- Name to name

- Eye to eye

- Hand to hand

- Heart to heart

(top20training.com, 2016)

The teacher will use each student's name. This lets the student know they are noticed and being paid attention to. The educator will make eye contact, which should be done appropriate to student culture. If students are uncomfortable with eye contact, the teacher can face the student. The teacher will use some sort of contact, such as a high five, fist bump, etc. This puts action behind words, which creates a stronger statement. Finally, the educator will mention something that is important to the student. This has an

emotional impact. Even though it is not always obvious, people understand that when someone mentions their personal interest, the person is paying attention and is more likely to care about them as a person.

These steps allow educators to create positive relationships between themselves and students. Cultural competency, cultural responsiveness, advisory, positive reinforcement, and building rapport are all effective ways to build positive relationships with students. When positive relationships have been created in the sheltered classroom, it is time to examine how the teacher/student relationship plays out as students succeed and move to the mainstream setting, which will include co-taught classes.

The Role of Co-teaching

The nature of the sheltered classroom is to prepare students to advance to the next level of proficiency. For ESL, this means students will become more and more proficient in the English language. When language learners move to the next level, one model students encounter is the co-teaching model. Co-teaching is a team of two teachers in a classroom. One teacher is the content expert and the other teacher is the language specialist. In co-teaching best practices, both teachers will act as the content teacher or language teacher at different times. The objective is to create an environment where content and language are seamlessly integrated (Chandler-Olcott and Nieroda, p. 2, 2016). The benefits of co-teaching range from having an additional adult in the classroom to having different personalities that students can connect with. All students are unique, and those unique students connect with different personality types. By having more

educators in the classroom, there is a higher chance that all students will be able to form more significant, positive relationships with teachers. Therefore, students will be more likely to reap the benefits of positive relationships. Furthermore, as students transition from the sheltered classroom to the mainstream, having an EL teacher in place as a co-teacher provides additional relationship support for language learners as they advance. Co-teaching is an integral component of building and maintaining positive relationships.

Increased Connections

Research done on using co-teaching to promote language learner literacy shows that learners are more successful when there is more than one teacher in the classroom providing support and respecting students as individuals (Chandler-Olcott and Nieroda, p. 8, 2016). In the co-teaching classroom, the additional teacher is available to promote student academic success. The mainstream/content teacher will benefit from being trained in how to build literacy among language learners (Chandler-Olcott and Nieroda, p. 9, 2016). Knowing the benefits of building strong, positive relationships between teachers and students, this sets the stage for the content teacher to become another positive influence on language learners in the classroom.

When the content teacher is equipped with an understanding of ESL best practices, they become even more effective at building relationships with language learners. The content teacher will understand the challenges language learners face in building their proficiency in English, which will make their successes all the more exciting (Cramer, Liston, Nevin, and Thousand, 2010). Content teachers should share in

the joys of successes with their ESL students as well as the language teacher. By increasing connections to positive adults, the language learner student receives an increased chance to benefit from the previously discussed effects of positive relationships. By giving the content teacher additional opportunities to make positive, professional connections with language learners, they will be equipped to advocate for their students who are language learners and language learners in general.

Adults as Models

The professionals in a co-teaching pair will act as models for positive relationships for their students when the co-teaching pair has had proper training and act in the best interests of students. The co-teaching pair shows students how to positively work together, how to follow social norms, and how to engage in positive reciprocity (Chandler-Olcott and Nieroda, p. 7, 2016). The shared space of the co-taught classroom models positive behavior between adults for students. This model brings about an inclusive classroom where all students can succeed and feel valued (DeMartino and Specht, 2018). The adults in the classroom model positive behavior for students and share their teaching roles. Students are introduced to positive behavior and a collaborative teaching relationship. The macro view looks at the school year as a whole. This modeling will influence students over time and the positive relationships they build with the adults in the co-taught classroom will promote student success.

Students will eventually graduate and hopefully go on to their dream career. When they do, students will need skills that help them perform as responsible adults in

the workplace and also the home. Teachers can model this behavior early on by showing how co-workers can respectfully interact with each other (Honigsfield and Dove, 2014). In co-teaching, one teacher will be hosting another in their classroom. When teachers use manners, show that they are comfortable with another adult using the tools and resources in their room, and utilizing the shared space respectfully, students are able to observe how positive relationships among adults work. These behaviors are the result of carefully planned norms (Chandler-Olcott and Nieroda, p. 6, 2016), which are imperative for students to see the co-teaching pair as a proper team. Co-teaching pairs model positive behavior for students. The learners who do not have access to any or as many positive adults in their lives will receive some of the only positive modeling from the classroom setting. If that setting is a co-taught setting, it is much more beneficial for students.

Transition from the Sheltered Classroom

Language learners progress through levels of proficiency with the support of their ESL teacher or teachers. In the preceding sections, it was discussed how positive relationships between the teacher and student in the sheltered classroom affect students, and how to create those relationships. In the course of a learner's progression through language proficiency levels, the ESL teacher is present to provide scaffolding (Rahmawati and Koul,2016). Co-teaching allows for another level where language learners can advance to the next level while still benefiting from the language teacher's support in the classroom. All of the supports and benefits from positive relationships carry over to the co-taught level. This next level also allows students to learn from the mainstream teacher and see how the language teacher and content teacher interact. The

language teacher will perform content tasks, and the content teacher will utilize language

building techniques (Honigsfield and Dove, 2014). While the content teacher and the

language teacher shift roles, students are aware of which teacher is which. Even though

students are aware of which teacher is the content teacher and which is the language

teacher, the shared roles will allow both language learners and native English speakers to

develop healthy relationships with all teachers (Honigsfield and Dove, 2014). Language

learners have a previous relationship with the language teacher. Having the language

teacher there brings in a method of teaching specifically to the specialist area and

scaffolding, which in this case is language (Cramer, et al., p. 66, 2010). The language

teacher's relationship with students helps to facilitate the transition to more advanced

language learner levels.

Conclusion

This discussion showed multiple facets of *how general education teachers can*

learn to build positive relationships with EL students by integrating EL best practice

strategies into their teaching. Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory is the

underpinning theory that emphasizes how important interpersonal relationships are to

developing learners and youth. The discussion revealed the effects of positive

relationships between students and teachers and how they create an environment where

success can be achieved. Ways to create and nurture positive relationships between

students and teachers were explored and related to the secondary classroom. Finally, as

students transition through language proficiency levels, co-teaching is a highly effective scaffold both socially and academically.

When working as an educator with language learners, it is vital to consider more than just the academic. The educator should strive to teach the student as a whole, which includes teaching to their social development. Since social development is a key factor in student academic and developmental progress, social development through positive relationships must not be neglected. The sheltered classroom is the best place for a language teacher to begin building positive relationships with students. The next section will describe the project, which will enhance both language teachers' and content teachers' ability to positively connect with and develop relationships with language learners.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

The literature review in Chapter Two described various facets of student/teacher relationships. The literature discussed the effects of positive relationships on student social success and academic achievement. The discussion examined how positive relationships are created and then explored the role of co-teaching in maintaining and expanding the scope of student/teacher relationships (Klingner, Boardman, Eppolito, and Shonewise, 2012). Effective methods for creating and maintaining positive relationships were discussed, such as cultural responsiveness (Porto, 2009) and the use of advisory to build community (Shulkind and Foote, 2009). The expanded view of understanding what positive relationships between students and teachers can do for students, how to create positive relationships, and how to expand them, sets the stage for the project. The focus of this project will be to show the impact of building positive relationships with students in the sheltered classroom. It will show *how general education teachers can learn to*

build positive relationships with EL students by integrating EL best practice strategies
into their teaching.

Outcome of the Project

The project is intended to equip educators with strategies and resources to better enable them to build positive relationships with their language learner students. Educators may already have resources and tools for building relationships with their native English speaking students and will be encouraged to draw on those resources. By drawing on past experience and available resources, the task becomes much more attainable for the professional educator, the target of this project. The learning targets for each session will be:

- Respect: I can reflect on the ways that I already foster a respectful environment in my classroom and extend that to include EL best practices with the support of the grade level EL teacher.

- Communicating Expectations: I can communicate classroom expectations to language learners with the support of language learner friendly vocabulary.

- Equitable Classroom Treatment: I can reflect on how equitable treatment can include language learners in my classroom with the support of the grade level EL teacher.

- Redirection: I can implement strategies for redirecting language learner behavior to desirable outcomes with the support of resources found on the building relationships website.

The learning targets are designed to draw on what educators already know and use in their classroom. This will extend their strategy use to include EL best practices and build a supportive coaching network. The next section will describe best practices in adult learning and show how the outcomes of the project use adult learning strategies to promote retention and use of the EL best practices.

Principles of Adult Learning

The target audience of the project is the grade level content teachers who will be encountering and educating language learner students in the school and in the classroom. The educators who make up this population are all college educated professionals who have prior teaching experience. Best practices in adult learning give effective methods for delivering content to adults. To be effective, content should be mindful of the experiences and professionalism of adults in attendance, be relevant to the professional setting of adults, and should be followed up with appropriate levels of coaching and feedback (Merriam, 2001).

Adults approach learning differently from children. Developmentally, children are not at the stage where many of them have an understanding of the value of learning. Adults, on the other hand, approach learning with an understanding that acquiring new knowledge is beneficial and important (Merriam, 2001). Since adults bring a wide variety of experiences to learning, the person delivering content should be mindful and respectful of the previous experience of what the participants already use (Knowles, 1970). The project that will be delivered as a staff development presentation respects adult experience and seeks to merge that experience with new information. In this case, the

new knowledge is a deeper understanding of how to enhance current classroom practices

to include EL best practices in positive relationship building. The participants will be

asked to reflect on current practices and how they will be able to blend in the strategies

for connecting with language learners.

In addition to validating and capitalizing on the experiences the participants bring

to the training, the project will be relevant to what the participants are already doing.

Adult learning differs from children's learning due in that children are being given a

foundation in many different areas. Youth in school may not use all of the content they

learn later in life, but they will use the skills and techniques from school to learn later in

life. Adults who have been through the education system are not seeking a wide breadth

of knowledge, but rather skills with practical applications (Knowles, 1970). This project

will address the concerns of adult learners by teaching specific skills that educators will

be able to use in the classroom. The project will also make resources available via a

website that will supplement content from the presentation. It will also provide

opportunities to reflect on current classroom practices.

Finally, the nature of the project will promote adult learning by making coaching

one of the key elements of the professional development experience. Coaching serves to

give the adults who have participated in learning the chance to continually refresh and

reflect on their learning (Joyce and Showers, 1982). The coaching model keeps content

fresh and allows the participant to receive current, insightful feedback on how strategies

have been implemented (Kegan and Lahey, 2009). This project will utilize the grade level

EL teacher as the coach. To reiterate, the project intends to respect the learning of the

adults participating. The coach is not acting as someone who is more knowledgeable than participants, but rather as a fellow professional who has additional insight to offer. Coaching does not have to be formally scheduled. It can be informal and can occur when the parties have time to meet. The grade level EL teacher will act as a coach who is there to discuss and listen as educators reflect on the content from the professional development session.

The target audience of grade level teachers will participate in professional development. The professional development sessions will be carried out in a series of four short sessions. After each session, educators will have the opportunity to participate in informal coaching sessions with the presenter, the grade level EL teacher. Educators will be able to give feedback on the content and learning from the professional development. Educators will be able to reflect on the successes and challenges of building positive relationships with the language learners in their classes.

Overview

The scope of the project involves teachers of language learners from a single grade level at the target school. The target school is a middle school. The school has a majority non-white population, with 20% of students being currently enrolled in the EL program (S. Ouk, personal communication, August 5, 2019).

The aim of this project is to build a resource in the form of a staff professional development that will be used to inform and encourage staff in the use of the most relevant and cutting edge techniques in building positive relationships with students. An online resource will also be created to supplement the information given in the

professional development. First the professional development will be constructed.

Interviews would be conducted with students prior to beginning the professional

development to develop a baseline of the student/teacher relationships. The next step

would be to engage grade level teachers in professional development that is relevant to

their relationship building strategies with language learner students. The professional

development is designed to run for about a month. It will combine both formal

professional development in small groups during team meetings and informal

conversations addressing educator questions and concerns about teacher/student

relationships during this time. After a month of formal and informal professional

development and coaching, the students of those teachers would be interviewed to gauge

their perceptions of their relationships with their teachers. Educator feedback from the

professional development would also be considered and examined because it should

reveal some influence on student perceptions.

Setting

The target school is a middle school that is part of a school district outside of the

metropolitan area of Minnesota. It could be described as an industrial town with rural

elements. The school in question is majority students of color. In the grade level that is

being selected, 20% of students are in the EL program. At the grade level, one teacher is

a non-white teacher. The rest are white. The EL program in the school serves all levels of

language learners, however, due to the political changes beginning in 2016, the numbers

of newcomer or WIDA level 1 students has become nearly non-existent. The newcomer

center in the school was dismantled at the end of the 2017-18 school year. Now, lower

proficiency learners are served by their grade level EL teacher in sheltered classes and attend mainstream classes.

Project Details

The project consists of a professional development that is supported by presentation slides and a web resource. The presentation was given in a face to face format to the 8th grade teachers who have contact with the language learners in 8th grade. The supplemental materials in the form of the website were available and were accessed after receiving the professional development.

Professional Development

I began the PD with teachers by utilizing time within the Common Planning Time (CPT) structure of the teams at the middle school. Best practices in building positive relationships with language learners will be delivered to staff during the meeting times. In keeping with staff development best practices, PD was not overly long or consisting mainly of me doing the talking (Condon et al, 2016). CPT meets every day at the middle school for a period of 48 minutes. There is usually time for staff members to either bring up concerns or share with other staff about considerations they need to know about students. I have used this time in the past for EL considerations. I used this time for both formal and informal styles of delivering content to the teaching staff in the CPT small group. The content delivery lasted about thirty minutes per session. A formal and informal conversational style that capitalizes on my trust relationships with other teachers combined with staff being able to converse, give input, and contribute increases staff buy-in during training times (Ferguson, 2006). Since this development is ongoing over

the course of four weeks, I included time to implement coaching sessions outside of CPT time. Coaching, when combined with staff development, yields far greater results than simply giving staff development (Desimone and Pak, 2017). The coaching is taking place outside of CPT when I meet with teachers individually. I am able to address questions and concerns that are relevant to individual teachers. Coaching also keeps the content from the PD fresh and relevant, so teaching staff are able to effectively implement it in the classroom. Staff will also be able to give feedback on how relationship building is working in their classrooms. Teacher feedback will be important to collect and use along with the student interviews, which teachers are encouraged to conduct. Teachers can revisit the interviews with students after attending PD sessions.

Conclusion

The evolution of positive relationships between students and teachers requires work from the language teacher of students in the sheltered classroom as both an instructor and as an advocate. The improvement also requires implementation from teachers in the mainstream classroom. The relationship between the two settings is one of transition, which language learners must navigate (Honigsfeld and Dove, 2014). Language learners themselves are also doing work in the process whether or not they are aware of it. The learner, as the other member of the rapport building cycle, is also building the relationship with the teacher (Dippold, 2014). Through the process of staff development, the intention is to strengthen and expand positive relationships between language learners in the sheltered classroom and their mainstream classroom teachers. In

the next chapter, the reader will be able to examine my learning in the course of

constructing this professional development.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the learning obtained from researching, building, and presenting the project about *how general education teachers learn to build positive relationships with EL students by integrating EL best practice strategies into their teaching.* The undertaking, as a whole, encompasses a vital subject in education. The value of building relationships is at the heart of the education process. It should be afforded the importance of a subject that has the potential to elevate student learning to its greatest heights. The undertaking began with research into the subject, followed by the construction of the project, and finally the presentation of the project material to teaching staff.

Research

The research of the subject of building positive relationships with EL students involved the reading of works from authors and researchers of varying notability. The principle philosophy that guided the flow of the research was informed by Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory. The philosophical underpinnings of Social Development Theory involve how the social context is central to student learning and

what students can do with or without assistance (Bodrova, Leong, and Davidson, 1994).

This has come to be known as scaffolding due to the imagery of a scaffold that allows

learners to 'climb' to new heights of knowledge. The reason that Vygotsky's theory was

the guiding philosophy for this project is that by building relationships with language

learner students, educators are developing a positive, healthy social context for students

to be more effective learners (Cressey et al, 2014). The research extended into specific

reasons why relationships are specifically important for language learner students. The

culture of students is valued and supported in positive relationships with educators.

Students who experience support of their culture are more likely to succeed academically

(Yamamoto and Zepeda, 2004). Due to language and ethnic diversity, language learners

face prejudice and bias from the dominant culture. Positive relationships with educators

encourage and support students as they confront bias and prejudice (Dippold, 2014). The

learning from researching how educators can build positive relationships with their

language learner students showed the need and urgency for developing these skills in

educators. The special considerations for educating language learners also extend into the

realm of building positive relationships with students. This informed how the project

would be constructed and delivered to general and content educators.

Project Construction

The project was intended to have the flexibility to be given as a large group

presentation or to be delivered in small groups to focus on teams of teachers where the

need for the content is the greatest. The project also took into consideration that a

different content delivery method would be needed since the project was to be directed at

adults instead of youth. Adults approach learning differently and desire content that will

be professionally applicable and practical (Knowles, 1970). For this reason, the project

was designed to give practical strategies that could be applied in the educators'

classrooms. Coaching was also included to provide the opportunity and flexibility for

educators to continue the discussion around positive relationships with their language

learner students (Joyce and Showers, 1982). Finally, a website was constructed as a

resource for educators to continue their learning at a self-directed pace. This was drawing

on additional best practices in adult learning that show that adults learn best when they

are able to direct the pace of their learning (Merriam, 2001). The project was intended to

present practical tools and strategies to strengthen educators' abilities to reach their

language learner students. By reaching their language learner students, educators will be

able to build positive relationships with them and help them succeed.

Presentation

The presentation of the content included a slideshow of information that was

divided into four categories. Each category would be presented in a different session. The

categories were: respect, communicating expectations, equitable classroom treatment,

and redirection. The sessions were each supposed to last for about thirty minutes. The

presentation style is a mix of presenting content matter on the slides, speaker delivery,

and collaborative techniques. The mix of presentation was intended to keep the content

from becoming dull and losing the interest of the audience. Following the presentation, I

made myself available for coaching either before or after school or during my prep. The

teachers in the session share common prep time. There was great flexibility built into the

coaching aspect that occurred outside of the main presentation time. Finally, the website was available as a resource that included links to sites that feature positive relationship building strategies, blog style posts that discuss positive relationships, and the presentation as a whole. The site was intended to connect educators to resources that would further their learning from the presentation and allow them to learn at their own pace.

My Learning

I began presenting the project in Common Planning Time, CPT. One thing that I did not expect was that we were also being given a staff development to work through during the meeting time that I intended to present. The content of the staff development was incredibly similar to the content of my own. Because of that, I was still able to present and it happened to be relevant to material the staff was already discussing. I presented the content once per week, and the sessions went roughly as long as I had planned. The discussions that the content sparked were lively. The collaborative piece was most effective part of the presentation in terms of opening a dialogue between staff about what they were seeing with different language learner students. I have been consulted in the past by teachers asking about language learner students and how best to work with them. This is in keeping with my role as the grade level teacher and the school's department head. However, this presentation sparked more conversation and collaboration than teachers simply seeking me out as the EL teacher. Teachers were exchanging ideas and their own experiences of what has been effective for building and developing relationships with language learners.

This project was presented in a small group and met with success. This has the potential to develop a positive and equitable environment for our language learner students as a school. Since I have been invited to be part of the school's equity team, I would like to have the opportunity to expand the scope of the presentation. I would envision this as remaining a small group presentation. The intimate nature of the setting allowed people who would not normally speak in a large group setting the opportunity to share out. I would advocate for this to be presented by the EL teachers from the other two grade levels to their respective teams. The presentation on building positive relationships with language learners is an important topic that must be revisited regularly, as well. I believe October (the month when the presentations began) was a good time to begin the discussion. Teachers have settled into their routines and are beginning to understand the personalities of their students. Students and teachers become more comfortable with each other. That being said, the discussion should be regular and should be followed up with collaborative sessions and additional coaching.

As the school year progresses, I will be continuing the discussion with my team, and advocating for an expansion of the discussion to other grade levels. I am positive that my position as department head and my invitation to the equity team will afford me the influence to foster change in the school community. The greatest concern is that professional developments can be seen as 'one and done' occasions that have no followup. To avoid that, the discussions will be ongoing and coaching will be available to teaching staff. The website will remain available, as well.

In the future, I will also intend to introduce student feedback about their perceived relationships with staff members as a supplement to the training. This would be informative to staff. It is difficult to be aware of how others perceive a relationship unless the other party is explicit in sharing their perception. Surveys for student feedback would be added in. This would enhance the relevance of the project to working professionals who are striving to become better educators. In the next section, I will reflect on the process as a whole.

Implications

The implications of this professional development are that equity will be promoted. By building positive relationships between language learners and staff, the staff will come to be more understanding of where language learners are coming from both literally and figuratively. The intentions go beyond simply improving student academics, but the professional development will promote and develop a culture of equity in the school community. A school community that values equity is an inclusive place for all students to learn and succeed.

Limitations

One limitation of how the project was delivered this initial time was that the content was not pushed out to all staff in the building. As the site moves to an equity mindset, the content will be delivered to all staff. The nature of building relationships and promoting equity is that it is most effective when all staff are aware and practicing the principles of relationships and equity. Another limitation is that the website was not designed by a professional. This will be rectified now that I have connected with the

school district's technology department. The site will be merged with the district equity website. It will be consistently and frequently promoted and accessed by staff across the school district.

Future Projects

The main push for a future project will be to add to and improve the website that will be built on the school district's platform. I am on the middle school site equity team, and I intend to use that platform to promote equity through a lens of relationship building between staff and students. The website will include resources such as the staff development. It will also include a blog-style portion that will reflect on the nature of building positive relationships in a professional setting. Finally, the website will make use of a forum for staff to discuss the principles of equity and learn from one another.

Communication of Results

The results of the professional development are already being communicated to other staff as a promotion of building positive relationships. The main push of promotion will take place as our district moves into an equity mindset. Results will be shared with the other members of the equity team as a way to identify where student teacher relationship building is strong at our site and where we could use more staff development and improvement. The results will also be used to identify where more attention could be given in the equity website that will go district wide. By using the learning from presenting the professional development, I will be able to effectively give advice to my colleagues as to which areas will benefit the most from additional attention regarding relationships building and how it relates to equity.

Benefits to the Profession

The benefits to the profession range from the immediate benefit that the presentation had on my colleagues who attended the presentation to the benefit of others who did not participate in the first round of presentations. The additional benefits are that the presentation will be accessible for other educators who wish to use it as a professional development tool. This presentation will also be used as a tool for delivering content to the entire staff at the middle school site. I have been asked to present in the past. I have made professional development a regular task that I am familiar with. As an influence, this project will affect how an equity mindset is promoted and developed within our district. I will continue to advocate for language learners and the use of best practices in language learner education.

Conclusion

I have had the privilege to educate language learners in both small group settings and in the co-taught setting along with general education teachers. My passion for working with students who are new to the country and learning another language is part of the reason why I decided to set out on this journey to build a project about *how general education teachers learn to build positive relationships with EL students by integrating EL best practice strategies into their teaching.* The other influencing factor that led to the creation of this project is that I have been able to co-teach with content educators. Their perspectives on educating language learners has been eye-opening for me. I am heavily involved with language learner to the point of immersion. I do not always have the lens of someone who does not regularly and intensively teach EL students. For this reason, I

wanted to develop a plan of action to support all educators in their creation and development of positive relationships with their language learner students. I have observed that this project sparked conversations and revealed insights that would otherwise have not occurred. This is for the benefit of the students.

I have observed that conducting this research and building the project has prompted me to research further into the subject of positive relationships than I have previously done. This project has also allowed me to take action on a subject that I feel very strongly about. The benefits go to our language learner students and also to educators who may be stymied about how to proceed when working with language learners. Sometimes, connecting with a language learner student and drawing out potential can seem like a puzzle. It was the intention of this project to provide a way to bridge the gap between student and teacher and to provide a platform for education to be successful.

One of the most important things I have learned through both my own experiences and through this project is that success is relative. Everyone starts from a different place. People come from different physical, emotional, and intellectual starting points, but everyone can advance and learn. There is pressure on the teaching profession to set students on a prefabricated path to someone else's definition of success. This might come in the form of MCA scores, grades, or college admissions. The goal that all students can reach, however, is growth. An important effect of this project is that, by building positive relationships with their students, educators construct an idea of where their students are at. Educators also witness growth during their time with a student.

Through the positive relationship between educator and student, objectives become clear and growth becomes evident. Education is a highly social practice. The most effective education can only be achieved through positive relationships between both parties, the students and the teachers.

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APPENDIX A

PROJECT CONTENT MATTER

APPENDIX B

WEBSITE

Website resource is located at:

https://mypstr.weebly.com/